TO: Massage Therapy/Bodywork Historians and Armchair Historians
FROM: Patricia J. Benjamin
Re: Exciting Discovery!

29 August 1991

I recently found this passage in the first edition of the first known book written in English on Pehr Ling's work - 1851. It is the earliest description I've found of the Western version of energy work. I suspect from the casual way it mentions "acting at a distance" that this was not a new idea. It remains to be seen if Ling himself used this approach or if it was added shortly after his death in 1839 by his successors at the Royal Central Institute in Stockholm - or if Roth slipped it in on his own.

In any case, it provides evidence for a long Western tradition of energy work and link between massage therapy/bodywork and mesmerism. It also sheds some light on the issue of whether to include disciplines which do not actually make contact with the client's skin under the general category of massage therapy/ bodywork.

Here it is:

"Stroking Movement. Stroking is done with the palm of the hand, or the palmar surface of the fingers, either in the direction of the longitudinal or transverse axis of the limb or of the body, or in a circular direction...According as we wish at once to influence the circulation of the blood and of the humours, by this passive movement, or to influence the nerves, the pressure of the hand is to be varied. In the latter case, the appulse [movement] must be so soft, that the mechanical influence of the pressure upon the skin is almost imperceptable; but if such is the case, that is, if the hand does not touch the body, we call it <u>acting at a distance</u>, the effect of which is often explained by mesmerism, although it is possible that it owes its effects to the air acting equally on the nerves of the skin." (Roth 1851, pp.94-95)

Very early reference to energy work in Western literature from:

Roth, M. (1851) <u>The Prevention and Cure of Many Chronic Diseases by Movements</u>. (London: John Churchhill [Publisher]). The first edition of the first known book written in English on Pehr Ling's Medical Gymnastics (Swedish Movement Cure).